TRANSCRIPT

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Ultimately that's what Vermont grown is all about. It's going to be a huge success with the customer.

Today on across the fence what it means to be Vermont-grown. We hear a lot about Vermont-grown Food but there are reasons why you want to buy Vermont-grown trees and shrubs and flowers too. We will go inside the green houses and nurseries of several Vermont growers are to find out why. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson. To begin our half hour holiday edition of across the fence want to welcome a frequent contributor whose expert advice can help your yard garden and overall landscape. With me is UVM extension horticulturalist Leonard Perry. Welcome Leonard.

Leonard.: It's fun to be back.

Judy.: I did Joan lynch from the green works which is a Vermont nursery and landscape association. John is vice president and she's also very involved with the initiative we will be talking about today and that's Vermont-grown period which is actually we will learn a little bit more about the association at the end but it actually comprises production which we will be seeing as you mentioned trees and shrubs and flowers but also important service sector of what is called the environmental horticultural industry. Vermont-grown is not really a new program. It came about first in the eighties with the Vermont seal of quality. Some people may remember that. But with all the up interest recently and local foods and so forth we thought it was important talk about local tree shrubs and flowers.

Judy.: Write we're glad you are with us Joan. Maybe you can give us an overview of the Vermont grow program and specifically what that means to consumers?

Joan.: Sure and thanks for having me here today. Green works is a strong supporter of the Vermont-grown initiative. Our association is comprised of experienced educated
horticultural professionals that realize and understand that the value of utilizing Vermont-grown plants because they're part of here. But if they're grown here but they know they will work here. And they will perform well in the landscape. Up it's also an opportunity for the members of our association to broaden their businesses by offering native plants Vermont locally grown plants. It also helps with the nursery sales and with the landscape designers utilizing them in their design. And it also is helping with the sustainability of native plants of native wildlife habitats as well as restoration of disturb sites. By having these plants available to us it's a direct link having sourced plants that are right here in Vermont to take care of these issues that we're now finding in Vermont.

Judy.: It seems like it just makes sense.

Joan.: It does. It makes perfect sense.

Judy.: Now Leonard you in the across the fence team visited three different growers to highlight what it means to be Vermont-grown where are we going to start?

Leonard.: We did and we thought this is a perfect time of the year when everyone's thinking about flowers on the brain and green houses to visit greenhouse. Will be going to Claussen's in Colchester which is unique in a couple of aspects. They are probably the largest producer in Vermont and they produce year-round. We will see some of the different crops but it's amazing to me where you start thinking bedding plants when those are going out there actually starting poinsettia in June when the poinsettia before they're out there planting bulbs and Easter lilies so it's a year-round operation.

Judy.: Amazing let's take a look.

The increase in the public's appetite for local food has many consumers looking to ‘go local’ in their home gardens as well. Springtime is when local greenhouses, garden centers, and nurseries growing

Vermont-grown plants and trees are in full flower.

Chris Conant / Claussen’s Florist & Greenhouse: “Our biggest season is right now.

Chris Conant is the Vice President of Claussen's Florist and Greenhouse in Colchester. Claussen's employs twenty-five full-time staff all of whom work year-round to plan, coordinate, and care for the millions of plants that are grown here each year.
Chris Conant/Claussen’s Florist and Greenhouse: “The customers appreciate the fact that when they walk in the door they’re recognizing the person behind the counter, the person in the greenhouse selling them the product, and the person on the end of the hose and we work very hard to make that happen ... that’s my job is to continue to build a relationship with employees that know what they’re doing, know how to share that and have the charisma to be able to work with a customer that’s what we strive for.

Like many local growers ... Conant and his staff make sure that the quality of their work is evident in the quality of the plant’s they sell.

Conant: “We work very hard to make sure that number one we’re sourcing the right material, number two protecting the plant once it arrives and whether it’s in the transportation stage or the planting stage and making sure it’s planted properly, but then also using the correct fungicides that will help protect that throughout the longevity of the crop and making sure that it is handled properly and grown at the right temperatures. We then turn around and make sure that our staff is on top of the nutritional values, making sure that the nutrients and care of those plants day to day are taken care so that the final product when it arrives in a customer’s hands is just the way it’s supposed to be ... and ultimately that’s what Vermont grown is all about is making sure the product that we grow is the right product, the varieties that we’re growing are the good varieties, strong varieties, hardy varieties for our climate and ultimately are going to be a huge success with the customer.”

A plant that has received proper care from a knowledgeable grower is apt to be more successful when it leaves the greenhouse, garden center, or nursery.

Conant: “You can look at a product on the shelf, you can look at a product on a bench and if it doesn’t look just right than there’s a good chance that it’s been stressed out during shipping, stressed out during holding and then ultimately in the end it’s going to be stressed out when the customer takes it home and the pride that we take in Claussen-grown Vermont grown products is the fact that we worked very diligently to make sure the finished product is going to be successful.”

Leonard Perry/UVM Extension: “Growing plants in a greenhouse is only one facet of what’s referred to as ‘environmental horticulture’ ... a term that incorporates greenhouses, plant nurseries, and landscapers. In the past decade greenhouse growers have seen an unprecedented increase in new plant varieties. For Conant, these new challenges have kept the work interesting and rewarding.”

Conant: “As I look through the greenhouses and I see all the different varieties that we grow. I feel incredible about the fact that there’s new plants here every year and that’s what gives us the edge over many of our competitors. We’re not afraid to try new things, new techniques, new seed sources, new varieties of cutting material and that’s the best part about our industry and we’ve always done that.”
The care that plants receive in these greenhouses is reflected in the attention given to flowers in floral shop. Using high quality fresh cut flowers increases the life of any floral bouquet or display.

Conant: “When our staff is handling fresh flowers in the flower shop of course we don't accept anything but top quality product from our wholesalers, we turn around and make sure our customers only accept top quality products from us too and that's not always the case with the mass merchandizers or the chain stores and I'm not being critical on them. And there is a difference between $12.99 dozen of roses and a $40 dozen of roses and I will always support either avenue as long as people feel that it is successful for them as a consumer. So, I look at ways that we can strengthen that for us and strengthen that for our customer and so bringing in new product bringing in new ideas and making sure you have darn good designers that know how to handle the product is the way that we can successful all around.”

Judy.: Claussen's seems like a pretty big operation Leonard. How does Claussen's fit into other or compared to other Vermont's greenhouses?

Leonard.: As I mentioned they probably are the biggest grower in Vermont with an acre or more of greenhouses but compared to the big scheme outside is that there actually come a small if you can imagine that. There's some huge operations around the country but Vermont is a small state and there just a lot of these growers. It's interesting that Claussen's I mentioned grows year-round and grows a lot of these things from seeds. A lot of these places will grow them what is called pre finished. They'll get them in at some stage which makes this industry not only all these varieties millions it seems but it's very complicated. Some plans will come in at one stage mothers another stage in the growers will grow them for various points but the bottom line is if you want something locally grown just pass the retailer if it's locally grown in Vermont and that's a good way to find out.

Judy.: Claussen's grows perennials as well but there's also specialty growers who only grow perennials. What can you tell us about Vermont's specialty growers Joan?

Joan.: We have several perennial growers here in Vermont that do just perennials. By focusing on just one of the aspects of horticulture and providing one kind of plant material their able to give us more than just up the workforce perennials are used to seeing every day in gardens. Taken branch out and give us some special items up hard to find things rare things such as some orchids. we have some growers that grow just one genus of plants such as hostas daylilies or one of my favorites it's which is peonies. these are the experts that know just what varieties of these plants will do best hear in our Vermont climates.

Judy.: Once again if you don't know that much about flowers or even if you do and want to learn something new it's great to visit a place and just learn about the different varieties or what might work in your landscape.
Joan.: Absolutely. There's nothing more fun than to talk to a plan person. They'll give you more information then you could ever possibly use in one day. We love to share what we know about our plants.

Judy.: Across the fence recently spend some time with one of Vermont’s specialty perennial growers Keith Silva takes us to Essex center to learn more about full circle gardens.

From peonies and primroses to hostas, heaths, and heathers … over eight-hundred perennial varieties in all and all of them are grown right here at Full Circle Gardens in Essex.

Sarah Salatino/Full Circle Gardens: “the most important thing is to sell people a product that is high quality. I don’t want to sell people something that isn't going to work for them. Even though there’s ten thousand plants or more I touch every single plant that comes through. I check plugs for diseases. I check cuttings and seeds. I monitor everything that comes through here.”

Salatino can keep a close watch on the plants she sells because she cultivates them on-site for more than a year which also means Salatino can root out problems and pests before they become a nuisance.

Salatino: “one of the things about being a Vermont grower is that I'm able to detect when invasive species come in on certain plants if they do. Also I've been keeping my eye on a lot species that I grow to make sure they don't have invasive tendencies. I mean certainly what might be a fine plant for another climate area may come in here and go wild. Case in point like purple loosestrife, what a gorgeous plant, who wouldn't want to have a purple loosestrife in their garden, but truthfully who would want a purple loosestrife in their garden when you have so many other great substitutes and you have a plant that knows it's boundaries.

Keith Silva/Across the Fence: Salatino opened Full Circle Gardens in 2009 ... she knew she was never going to be able to best the 'boxy' mass-market retailers on price. She decided that her niche would be to sell hardy, locally-grown plants and flowers that are Vermont grown and bred to last.

Salatino: “There’s no way that I can afford to grow a quality plant that meets my standards for the prices that mass-markets do so understandably I can see why people choose that over one of my plants, but one thing that I can stand behind with plants grown in Vermont not just my personal Vermont grown plants, but other nurseries who do grow their own plants is that we know that these plants are going to make it in this climate. I know that when this goes out the door that a person is getting a plant whether they're an expert gardener or a novice gardener they're getting a plant that's going to survive in our climate and that will be enjoyable for them for years to come.”
Small plant nurseries like Full Circle Gardens have the advantage over large-scale retailers by being able to offer unique and exclusive perennial varieties instead of only the old stand-by or the run-of-the-mill.

Salatino: I’ve chosen to focus on selling plant material and with that comes this wonderful opportunity to really branch out in a lot of different varieties of plants. There’s so many new patented varieties coming up on the market that I can get a hold of and sell. A lot of brand new Echinacea’s, very unusual colors. That’s what’s exciting about this nursery, whereas with a mass-market they aim for a small variety of plant material because they are not as proficient in taking care of it and they also have to aim for what consumers will buy. Which I do to to a certain extent, but I just want to show them all different kinds of varieties of perennials that they can choose from. Things that they never thought of trying before that can work here in Vermont.

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The diversity of plants at Full Circle Gardens is due in large part to Salatino’s work with University Vermont Extension Plant and Soil Science professor Leonard Perry. Salatino has participated in many of Perry’s plant trials that help growers learn what varieties grow best in the Green Mountains.

Salatino: “One of the benefits of being part of the UVM trial studies is that I am able to tap into all this knowledge and work and study that is happened through UVM Extension. I feel very tied into the University any time I have a problem or a question I’m able to contact Dr. Perry and find loads of research and information on how to change my practices so I can grow better plants.

At this nursery it’s a mixture of research, care, and quality that brings everything ‘full circle.’ In Essex, I’m Keith Silva with Across the Fence.

Judy.: Thanks Keith I love the dinosaur. Now Leonard you have a listing of some of the perennial nurseries?

Leonard.: Yes as John mentioned there’s quite a few in the state and of my web site Carries perennials.info under the garden section there’s actually a link a whole page devoted to those who have display gardens so you can see all the contact information and who knows what is the specialty or more general.

Judy.: We’ve been talking about plants and flowers but what about trees and shrubs? but Joan are there growers focused on Vermont-grown trees and shrubs as well?
Joan.: Absolutely. We have some growers that grow all there trees and shrubs in the field as we will see our next segment. But we also have growers who grow everything in containers from seedling to finished product. Which you want to do when you go to the retail markets is you want to ask for or look for local names local growers. Ask the retailer's wear these products and if they're not there why? Why are they there?

Judy.: Excellent well we're going to head to Shelburne now that's where across the fence is Rebekah Gollin found south 40 nursery afield grower of trees and shrubs.

VJ Comai / South Forty Nursery: “when you buy a tree, what is below the tree is every bit as important as what’s above.”

VJ Comai has been the nursery manager at south 40 nursery for over 20 years. He’s what you might call “hands-on”.

Comai: “all of this shrubs are dug by hand, you know in any given year I dig anywhere from 600 to 1200 shrubs in the spring. And then I dig another 4 to 600 trees depending on the year, and those are all done with the use of a hydraulic tree spade.”

Like many Vermont nurseries, South Forty is dedicated to growing trees and shrubs that are native to Vermont.

Comai: “everything that is sold here was grown here and it’s all primarily balled and burlap production, meaning the trees and shrubs are grown in the ground for approximately 3 to 5 seasons depending on the species and the varieties, and then we harvest them at this time of year from when the ground is thawed until things leaf out, which is a very narrow window, especially in the year like we're having.”

Like many nursery managers and owners, Comai lives on the property, and does almost everything by himself.

Comai: “when I put a plant in the ground I'm making a big investment, I'm going to have 3 to 5 growing seasons into the plant, and a lot of time and a lot of expense, so I don't attempt to grow things that are marginal”

Rebecca Gollin /Across the Fence: “Using native plants can offer a number of advantages. They are hardier in the harsh Vermont winters, and naturally disease resistant. Transplanting Vermont grown trees and shrubs is more successful because they are being planted in soil similar to what they are used to. That success rate means a lot to Vermont landscapers. “
Jay Spaulding / Open Earth Landscaping: “we've seen in our business for over 10 years, the native plants will out-compete the nonnative plants, day in and day out.”

Jay Spaulding owns Open earth landscaping in Swanton. Whether it’s for a newly built home, or a commercial property, Spaulding says using native plants is a win-win.

Spaulding: “well, for us, the reason why we use native plants for open earth is that it makes sense in terms of dollar wise, we know that the native plants are going to do well here, you know, zone three zone for, so if I'm going to go to south 40 or cobble creek or Gardner Supply or wherever the local nurseries are, I'm going to be more apt to look for the native plants because I'm not going to take the chance in installing something that's from the southern part of America or whatever. So having the native plants, we do make money, and you know the homeowner wins, and we also win too.”

Down the road in St. Albans is a project that Spaulding and his team worked on.

Spaulding: So what we're looking at here is a planting plan that we did for Handys Chevrolet we use a lot of the native species, of autumn blaze, and behind us are arborvitaes... The trees have been here for five years now, since the job... We had a great survival rate with all of the local trees that we purchased from VJ, from south 40, and a lot of the evergreens we purchased from cobble creek, so yeah, the success rate we had with all these trees was good, it was great actually.

Spaulding says that using native plants was a priority for his client.

Spaulding: “That meant a lot to their family, keeping all the product locally, and that we installed it, I think everyone benefited, and we were able to keep all our business in Vermont “

Back at south 40, Comai is hard at work.

Comai, demonstrating pruning – “you can see where I pruned this tree this past winter, and the chutes were actually almost twice as long, and I did what is called a heading back cut, I cut it back and what will happen here is that we'll then promote secondary branching, these two buds will break and go outward, I cut and left in outward growing bud, so this one will continue upward, and the tree will fill out.”

Along with a number of varieties of shrubs, including lilacs, hydrangeas and forsythia, Comai estimates that he grows between 25 and 30 different types of trees.
Comai: “I grow willow, several different types of maple, river birch, a number of different crab apples, probably half a dozen different varieties of crab apples, all of which are very disease resistant. 0:26:45.3 - for the Champlain valley I'm particularly fond of the different magnolias. I grow three different magnolias right now... I think there are great plant, early flowerings, sometimes too early, but in the Champlain valley their very hearty, they look good all year, and they don't tend to have a lot of disease problems on the foliage”

For Comai, where his plants end up is just as important to him as where they start out...

Comai: “I'm attached to these plants, they're my babies, you know I've been nursing them along for 3 to 5 years, so when stuff leaves here I want to know where it goes. And I often ask landscapers where are you planting this, and I'll follow up to see how the plants are doing."

Keeping native plants in the landscape for Vermont. In St. Albans, I'm Rebecca Gollin with Across the Fence.

Judy.: Thanks Rebecca. Back in the studio I'm with UVM extension horticulturalist Leonard Perry has and vice president of green works Joan Lynch. John you also run your own business in Pittsford called the inner garden is your business involved with Vermont plants as well?

Joan.: Yes it is. We're not a grower but we are the user of the end product what we do is what we offer landscape design and installations for sustainable landscapes as well as the greening of interior's utilizing indoor plants. I buy Vermont-grown because am confident in what their performance will be regardless of where installation as across a state. Not only does Vermont-grown work for everybody and also was one that helps with a local economics or the local communities. It puts and keeps people in business.

Judy.: We have a lot of talented landscape professionals in Vermont. We've met several guests on across the fence including some who've written books on landscape designs for home gardeners. When we recently met with landscaper and author Julie Moir Messervy the to talk about her book outside the not so big house.

Leonard.: Tell us something about this intriguing title outside the not so big house.

Julie.: Yes is a funny title but it actually works well. Saras Sisanka was my co-author on this book. Is a wonderful architect who has a series of books called the not so big house series. They were looking specially in the last decade at this factor that houses are getting to be too big. Specially for their lots. Mansions on the tiny lots with nothing left behind
around the house seem to be a sad state of affairs so she wrote these books how you could live a quality life in a small space. Then asked our publisher asked me to work with her on what you do around a house. How do you make the outside as wonderful as the inside. So this book is really a wonderful set of case studies. 20 case studies some of my gardens and theirs well about relatively small houses not necessarily small sites but how is it that inside and outside house in landscape can interrelate intricately in a wonderful way. It was a really fun book to write. You'll see some great projects in there that are from all over the country with sketches and plans to illustrate them.

Leonard.: Could you give an example how you'd think about making the inside in the outside relate?

Julie.: Yes. I think about it every single window that you have in your house looks out onto your landscape if you imagine that window is basically a work of art of landscape by what is it that you're looking through to see. So for instance one thing I like to think about one of the major principles in that book that I think is important is repetition of elements or repetition of something. What's going on inside to what's going on outside and vice versa. The style of your fence around your house Wallace sort of a landscape element should also relate to the style of your house specially if it butts up against the house. It's a lot of ideas like that that are practical but also conceptually important ideas about how do you pull your house and your landscape into one.

Leonard.: Great it sounds like some great ideas that most people can get something from it is not an exact idea it's a concept that can take home and use.

Julie.: I hope so yes that's what we tried for.

Judy.: We're going to wrap up today's program by learning more about green works Vermont nursery and landscape association. Joan lynch is the association vice president. Joan tell us some of the extracurricular work that the association does?

Joan.: What we do is where association that represents landscapers designers garden centers growers Arborists turf specialists all these people come together and what we do is we like to consider ourselves an indispensable resource for the public. As you know where the producers of the Vermont flower show which is a biennial event held in Essex at the fairgrounds. We had our last show in march. It's a three day fantasy of callers site smells sound and also three days of educational seminars and workshops. Many of those presentations are provided by the members of our organization. Also we are the administers of Vermont certified horticulturist program with the VCH and that is a professional certification of a rigid certification process for our members by achieving that certification there now professionals and are ready to speak with the public and help problem solve any problems they may have with their homes.
Judy.: And you have a website that you want to share?

Joan.: Yes we do it is green works Vermont.org

Judy.: It's great to have this resource for folks and we really should take more advantage of it because it could save you a lot of time and money and frustration if you get the information before you start buying plants in putting them in.

Joan.: Absolutely.

Judy.: Thanks to both of you.

Joan.: Thank you.

Judy.: That's our program for today thanks for joining us happy memorial day I'm Judy Simpson will see you again next time on across the fence.

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